

A Real Look: A Video Documentary of Life in the Honors College

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**By**

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**Thesis Advisor**

Laura O'Hara

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura O'Hara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Ball State University  
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## Abstract

Stereotypes about Honors College students have always existed, both within the Honors College and outside of it. The stereotypes range from Honors College students having no social life at all to being extreme over achievers and only caring about grades and resume building. Whichever stereotype was chosen, it was used to generalize every student within the Honors College. Rachel and I created a video documentary portraying the diverse backgrounds and campus involvement of Honors College students. We surveyed over 200 Honors College students asking about their background and involvement on campus and chose 12 of these students to interview. As we interviewed we also gathered the thoughts of students on the strengths and weaknesses of the Honors College and formatted the answers into a paper format. We used this paper to provide suggestions to better improve the Honors College experience for future students.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rachel Marten for doing this thesis together and never wanting to get a divorce. Her help and friendship during this project and for the past four years of our college career have been wonderful.

I would like to thank Dr. Laura O'Hara for advising the both of us through this thesis. Her advice and constant encouragement during the project are just a small part of the role she has played in my life in the past three years as a mentor.

I would like to thank Paul Brown, Jenna James, and David Sheets for their help and expertise in their respective fields of telecommunications.

I would like to thank Christine Edgeman who helped us print hundreds of questionnaires in the Communication Studies department to give to the students.

I would like to thank my family and fiancé who have always lovingly supported me in all of my endeavors as a student.

I would like to thank God without whom none of this would be possible.

## Table of Contents

Pre-Author's Statement.....	1-2
My Perspective.....	1
Rachel's Perspective.....	2
Author's Statement.....	3-12
Link to Video Documentary.....	13
List of Interviewees.....	14
Strengths and Weaknesses of the Honors College.....	15-19
Appendix A- Proof of IRB Application	
Appendix B- Sample of Informed Consent Forms	

## **Leanne's Perspective**

As I started the process of trying to figure out how to end my Honors College experience, I was unsure as to what type of thesis I wanted to end with whether it would be a creative project, an essay or something that I never would have dreamt of. I did know that I wanted it to be something different than anything I had ever done before in my college career. As Rachel and I started to discuss our options, Rachel mentioned the idea of making a video documentary about breaking stereotypes in the Honors College. We both saw the excitement and potential we had in this project as we started discussing the advancement of our telecommunications skills and the opportunity to provide a real look into the college that has made such a huge impact on our lives at Ball State University.

Throughout the project, Rachel and I have had to overcome some obstacles, but we have also had the chance to grow and advance in so many different skill sets. As we completed our thesis, I believe that this project was completely different from anything that I had ever done on campus. Rachel and I were pushed out of our comfort zone to learn new software, meet new people, and create a new project that we had no idea how it would turn out. As we watched the final documentary, I do believe that we accomplished our goal of providing a real, sincere view into the life of various Honors College students who encompass the spirit and atmosphere of the Honors College as a whole. Most importantly, I also believe we accomplished our goal of growing as students, as communicators, as friends, but most importantly as individuals.



## **Rachel's Perspective**

This project has taken on a life of its own and I could not be more excited about it. When I first started thinking about completing my Honors thesis, I had the idea of taking pictures of people involved in the Honors College (e.g. students, professors, resident hall directors, etc.) and tell their life stories in a description next to the picture. I told many people about my idea, one of them being Leanne, and we ran with it. Bringing Leanne in on this thesis has broadened my original direction, but has also made this project more applicable to my major of Communication Studies. Without Leanne's prompting, this project would not have reached its potential.

I have grown a lot throughout this process from my video editing skills to my interviewing skills to my interpersonal communication skills, in general. Without this thesis project, I would not have had the chance to grow in these specific ways. I now can emerge from this project more confident in my videotaping and video editing skills, which is something I have wanted to learn in the past. I completed a class on the topic of interviewing in the fall of 2011, but this project brought those concepts to life. Contacting professors, communicating our progress with Dr. O'Hara, and relating to Leanne on a regular basis strengthened my interpersonal communication skills.

Overall, this creative thesis has stretched me in ways that I did not anticipate when I first came to campus in 2008, but I am very grateful it did. I have learned more about my friend Leanne, the world of technology, and myself through this project.

## **Our Perspective**

As we began this journey of creating a video documentary featuring Honors College students, we had a specific idea and direction in mind. We thought we would focus on ethnic diversity, but also examine age diversity and campus involvement within the Honors College student body. We wanted to see how this diversity related to the impact the Honors College has had on students' lives.

When we first started surveying students, we wanted to focus on the students that fit our criteria of diversity, whether in ethnicity or age. However, we soon found that what really brought diversity to the Honors College was the personality and campus involvement of each student, no matter their ethnic or racial diversity. We no longer were trying to make the Honors College fit our definition of diversity, but rather we saw and embraced the diversity that actually stemmed from the Honors College. With this realization, we knew that the documentary would be something completely different from what we envisioned it to be, but we were ready to see what it would shape into.

In preparing the interview questions, we decided to focus on three main topics. The first topic was the general experience of the Honors College, i.e. how and why the students decided to join the Honors College and what they experienced in the DeHority Living Learning Community. We also asked about their expectations coming into the Honors College and if their experience lived up to those expectations. Many of the interviewees enjoyed the fact that there was a common foundation between everyone in the Honors College. They could relate well to each other both academically and socially, and because of that formed close relationships. Furthermore, because the

Honors College has the most involved students on campus, many interviewees talked about the fact that in the Honors College Living Learning Community there was never a dull moment.

The second topic was the idea of stereotypes and how these students broke the stereotypes that they thought were perceived of them. We first asked if students thought there was a stereotype for Honors College students and almost all of them said they believe a stereotype exists. The stereotypes ranged from being not social and “nerdy” to being privileged and snobby. We then asked them how they broke that stereotype. Each student interviewee had a different answer for how they broke the stereotype. Some of the students talked about the activities that they were involved in such as Greek life, athletics, Student Government Association and many other organizations. Other students talked about living in the DeHority Complex and knowing how social and loud it is every single night. Other students related anecdotes about the craziest things they have done within the Honors College including holding church in the showers, playing capture the flag at midnight in the quad, and having water balloon fights. One student captured the true personality of the Honors College when he said that the Honors College is like a miniature version of the entire campus. He said, “In the Honors College you find people who like to play video games, who like to play sports, who like to study. You will find nerds, athletes, Greek students, extroverted people and introverted people just like you will find nerds, athletes, Greek students, and extroverted and introverted people all throughout Ball State’s campus.”

The third topic that we chose to interview about was how the Honors College has impacted the interviewee's college career. We interviewed a wide range of students from freshmen to alumni, and the answers that we received were astounding in their depth and their breadth. Many students spoke of a change of their world perspectives. When asked how students responded to this in a practical application, one student talked about never setting foot in a Wal-Mart after hearing about its illegal operations in an Honors class. Another student talked about learning more about her family's ancestry and background because of an interest that was sparked in an Honors class. One other student talked about an internal change where he felt smaller and more humbled after reading and discussing many texts about third world living conditions in one of his Honors classes.

After hearing these responses, we both knew this documentary would be more of a real portrayal of the Honors College than just specifically focusing on diversity. It was incredible to see the impact and change that the Honors College has had on so many students that we did not think about before starting our project.

In the documentary, we chose to portray these three topics with a montage of students' answers. After this montage, we chose to showcase three individual students with their own unique perspectives on the Honors College. One of the students, Blake, talked about how the Honors College empowered him to follow his passions to perform music rather than take the conventional route of the "American Dream". Another student, Julie, created her own major through the Medallion Scholars program in the Honors College. She combined her passions for art, dance, and her desire to help

people in one major as a creative arts therapist. The last student, Jason, spoke of the balance that he found as an Honors College student and as a Greek fraternity brother in Phi Gamma Delta. We chose these three specific students because they greatly benefited from their experiences in the Honors College. We believe that they embodied the spirit of the Honors College well in their unique experiences. These students also took the greatest advantage in what the Honors College has to offer and used these resources to grow more in their education and their understanding of themselves and their futures.

After gathering all of our footage, we decided to create two separate videos for the Honors College website. The first video will feature the benefits of the Honors College and will only last a couple of minutes. We hope this preview video will entice students to watch our complete documentary and provide more information about the Honors College to those students who may be unsure about their Honors College choice. This video will be uploaded to the actual Honors College website. The second video will be the complete version of our documentary that encompasses all three of the topics that we covered as well as the three students we showcased. This video will be uploaded to YouTube where prospective students can find it if they are researching about Ball State University's Honors College program. There will be a slide at the end of the first video that will lead audiences to our complete documentary.

Another aspect to our thesis was students' perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of the Honors College. We gathered this information by asking each interviewee, "What is one thing you would change about the Honors College?" We also

asked them, “What is one thing you greatly benefited from in the Honors College?” We compiled the interviewees’ responses to these two questions into an appendix at the end of this paper. These strengths and weaknesses will provide the Honors College with suggestions and improvements for future students.

Before we began this process, we thought we needed to receive permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to continue with our thesis since we were working with human subjects. Over Christmas break and the first month of the spring semester, we, along with our advisor, completed the tutorials to receive permission from Ball State’s IRB to continue our project. However, as February rolled around, the IRB contacted us and told us that our project was not an actual research project, and therefore we did not need to receive permission from their organization. This information was disheartening at first, but we then realized how beneficial that first month was for our project. Going through the IRB caused us to begin our project early and write our questionnaire a month ahead of time. Also, we are now familiar with the IRB process for future research endeavors.

Another obstacle we faced dealt with the technological problems of the documentary. Before we had an external hard drive, we had to work on different computers in the University Teleplex in the Ball Communication building on campus. Because we uploaded various interviews onto different computers, we ended up losing two of the interviews in the chaotic process. We did not realize we had lost these two interviews until we were in the middle of the editing process. In Final Cut Pro, it is imperative an individual sets the video to save to the right drives, whether that’s on the

computer or on an external hard drive. Once we got an external hard drive, we had to set the video to save to that drive instead of the computer. It was in this process that we lost the two interviews. We had saved the video project to the hard drive, but the video that we were capturing was saved to one of the computer's drive. Because we are not telecommunication students, the video editing and recording process was a learning experience for both of us. There were times when the audio was not capturing on the video camera. There were also instances where we had a vision for the project, but could not put it together in Final Cut Pro because of our amateur status with the program. Through these experiences, we had two choices. One was to adapt and change the documentary to something within our skill set. The second choice was to ask for help from our friends who are telecommunication majors to help make our vision a reality.

Another technological difficulty that we experienced was the actual editing of the footage. Once we picked our final eight interviewees and listened to their complete recordings, it was difficult to pick and choose what we actually wanted in the documentary. All of the interviewees were articulate and passionate about the Honors College, and it was difficult for us to cut out segments of the interviews that were well articulated but did not actually portray the topic of our thesis. To solve this problem, we created specific criteria that the interview had to fit for that part to make it into our documentary. After establishing this criteria it was easier to move in the specific direction we had in mind and continue with our project.

One final obstacle we had to overcome was contacting all of the professors in the Honors College. First, we referenced a list of the Honors classes that were offered during the 2012 spring semester to obtain the professors' names. We then used the Ball State directory to acquire their email addresses. We had written the email to contact the professors during the IRB process, so we emailed them rather quickly. We contacted approximately 20 professors to begin our data collection. Over the course of three weeks, we went to various Honors College classes and administered our questionnaire to the students. At the end of the three weeks, we had over 200 completed questionnaires. The next step in the process was to narrow down our questionnaires to 12-15 interviewees. Our first filter was to choose participants that fit our criteria of age diversity and ethnic diversity. We also looked at their responses to our questionnaire about the impact that the Honors College has played on their beliefs, ideas and lifestyles. However, as our documentary evolved and changed we soon began to focus not only on diversity, but also campus involvement and more on the changed lifestyle of the individual. We also branched out to interviewees that we heard about via word of mouth from other students or professors. After we chose these twelve interviewees, we contacted them via email and set up appointments to audio and video record them at a time of their convenience.

After choosing the twelve interviewees, we had two very distinct roles. Leanne played the role of the interviewer. She prepared questions based off of the responses of each interviewee's questionnaire. While we interviewed the students, Leanne had to focus on her listening skills and really learn how to listen to what the students were



saying. Leanne worked on creating probing questions right after each original question depending on what the interviewee said, causing them to delve deeper and expand more on their original answer. These probing questions proved to be the ones that provided the best and most knowledgeable answers. She also learned how to recognize and analyze different nonverbal cues and adjust her questions accordingly. Leanne also learned how to resist from framing her interview questions and guiding the interviewees into a certain answer that she wanted to hear rather than having them answer the questions honestly.

Rachel took the role of the videographer. She made sure the audio and video set up was always the same and often shot in a very creative and cohesive way. Before this project, Rachel had enjoyed being behind the camera and operating electronic equipment. Now that the interviews have been completed, she enjoys operating the equipment even more. Rachel has also been heading up the editing of the documentary as well. We had a tutorial with one of our friends who is a student in the telecommunication department about the operation of the video editing program, Final Cut Pro. Once we started capturing the footage onto the computer, Leanne typed up a log of each interview during the initial stage and Rachel set up the systems for the capturing. Rachel has enjoyed the shooting and editing process. She has grown in her understanding of video equipment, since all she knew before this project was handheld camera video capturing. Overall, Rachel has learned a lot about the filming and editing processes. This is a skill she will be able to take with her into the real world after

college and she would not have had these experiences without the Honors College thesis project.

If we had more time to complete our project, we would have learned more and gained more experience editing in Final Cut Pro. Although, we scratched the surface this time around, we would love to dig deeper into all the features it has to offer. By gaining a larger knowledge base previous to editing our project, we could have known what kinds of shots we would want for b-roll as well.

If we had another chance to do our project, we would change our process in gathering our interviewees. We originally took a quantitative approach to analyze our data and narrow down our interviewees because it was a more subjective approach. However, we soon realized that objectivity in gathering our interviewees was not a problem, since it was more of a creative project instead of a research project. As we were gathering data, we found it difficult to judge whether a student should be an interviewee or not just by looking at circled responses and multiple-choice questions. It was hard to uncover students' stories just by looking at a questionnaire. If we could do our project over, we would begin the qualitative research process right at the beginning. We would do this by having the students write short responses about how the Honors College has impacted their lives rather than having them answer multiple-choice questions about their beliefs about the Honors College. Furthermore, we would have done the video gathering and editing in a different way. When we compile video footage for the documentary, we gathered B-Roll as we were also filming the interviews. This caused difficulties because as we started piecing the footage together we realized that

we did not need some of the B-Roll that we filmed or that we were missing B-Roll that we actually needed. By that time it was too late to contact the interviewees to film more B-Roll of them. If we had a second chance to do this project again, we would start editing the interviews earlier and also wait to film B-Roll until we had a main timeline of the actual footage so we could judge what B-Roll we actually needed and what we did not need to film.

As we completed this project, we uploaded the video to this YouTube URL: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXCJGMEOzFw&list=FLDEhLMNIucNk5kuiBbYrfCg&feature=mh\\_lolz](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXCJGMEOzFw&list=FLDEhLMNIucNk5kuiBbYrfCg&feature=mh_lolz). Throughout this whole process, we have learned so much and gained different perspectives about the Honors College. We were thankful that we chose to create a project that was out of our comfort zone. Because neither of us were telecommunications majors, we had minimal experience with video and audio recording equipment and Final Cut Pro. We learned how to operate both types of recording equipment as well as familiarize ourselves with the editing software, Final Cut Pro. These skills are trades that we could transfer to any type of communications job that we choose. The newness of the challenge of learning new software also made the creation of the thesis very enjoyable for the both of us. With this increase in knowledge and understanding, We hope to share our findings and documentary with prospective students who are considering coming into the Honors College.

## **Link to Video Documentary**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXCJGMEOfw&list=FLDEhLMNIucNk5kuiBbYrfCg&feature=mh\\_lolz](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXCJGMEOfw&list=FLDEhLMNIucNk5kuiBbYrfCg&feature=mh_lolz)

## **The List of Interviewees**

1. Jason Fry – Sophomore, Entrepreneurship and Operations Management major
2. Daniela Sorrell – Freshman, Spanish Education major
3. Blake Mohler – Junior, Cellular Biology and Biotechnology major
4. Julie Matlik – Sophomore, Medallion Scholar
5. Chloe Barnes – Senior, Business Administration and Fashion Merchandising major
6. Brandon Buller – Alumnus, Music Technology major
7. Stephanie Buller – Alumnus, Dance major
8. Sydney Brown – Junior, Business major
9. Rachel Handt – Sophomore, Exercise Science major\*
10. Alyssa Myers – Senior, Music Education major\*
11. Casiana Warfield – Freshman, Psychology major\*
12. Joy Sobey – Freshman, Journalism Graphics major\*

\*Not in video documentary

## **The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Honors College**

As we interviewed the students we began to realize that many of them had great things to say about the Honors College and how it has greatly benefited their college career. However, we also realized that many of them wanted their voices heard as to how the Honors College could be improved. We compiled the responses of our interviewees into this strengths and weaknesses paper as a means to help the Honors College improve and strengthen the program that has affected so many students already. However, this list is by no means exhaustive. There are many more perspectives and opinions that we were not able to document. With the time and resource restrictions, we only received answers from our eight interviewees.

### **Strengths**

One strength that was stated by Stephanie Buller was the choice that students had to pick some of their classes, specifically the colloquium. She liked the freedom there was to choose what she wanted to take and there was not just a list of classes to take. She said, "You can pick and choose according to your personal taste." She specifically mentioned the colloquiums as a great way to learn about a subject in depth that she never would have gotten the chance to learn about such as Disney or Jane Austen.

Another strength stated by Rachel Handt was the encouragement in the Honors College to get involved. Many of our interviewees believed that the most involved students on campus lived in the Honors College. Rachel described her first semester

experience as one where she only cared about academics and grades. However, seeing all of the busyness and involvement around her in the Honors College caused her to get involved as well. "I saw that college wasn't just about grades or doing well in school, it was about getting involved and doing things that you love, too," Rachel said. Rachel is now involved in her sorority and in the Exercise Science club for her major as well.

Brandon Buller, an alumnus of the Honors College, started his job search in December of this year. He said that his experience in honors classes greatly benefited his job search and interviewing process. "I'm already used to thinking quickly on my feet and backing up my opinions because of all the discussions we had in my honors classes," Brandon said. Because of the way honors classes are set up, extremely discussion based, Brandon was not nervous walking into his job interviews because he was already very confident in his oratory skills and beliefs in his opinions. He now works at REI in Castleton, Indiana as a bike mechanic, which he assures us is his dream job.

## **Weaknesses**

Brandon also had a suggestion for the Honors College to improve its program. He suggested that the selection process to be accepted in the Honors College should be more selective, including an entrance interview with Dean Ruebel and Dr. Emert. He mentioned that there were a few cases where some students in classes held the discussion back because they were not on the same level as the other students. He

acknowledged that the Honors College is trying to expand its influence and invite more students, however, he believed that the process should still be more selective as to not hinder the progress of the classes. "I'm not trying to make it seem super hierarchical, but if the Honors College wants to do what it is trying to do, then I think it would help if they were a little bit more selective in their interview," Brandon said.

Chloe Barnes, a senior women's basketball player, also had a suggestion to improve the Honors College. She would increase the integration between the rest of the students on Ball State's campus and the Honors College students. If there was more integration, Chloe believes that would help break down untrue stereotypes of Honors College students. She said, "It's almost like a double edged sword. Living in DeHority was great, but there is a divide sometimes, which leads to stereotypes." She did not mention any specific ways to close the divide between other students and Honors College students, but she did mention that there should be a change.

The last student, Daniela Sorrell, wanted to incorporate more outside work into the Honors College classes. For example, she mentioned volunteering or doing more outside of just the classroom. She has benefited so much from the different ideas and perspectives that she has heard in the classroom, however, she also wants to go and put those ideas and perspectives into practice. "It is one thing to sit in the classroom and discuss the ideas, but it is another thing to go out and do something with those ideas," Daniela said. She believes that going forth with those ideas would bring hope and change to the Muncie community.



## Our Perspective

After hearing all of the perspectives from our interviewees, We also wanted to think about our own personal experience in the Honors College in the past four years. One specific strength that came to mind for the both of us was the diversity and the availability of the professors. Leanne loved the fact that the Honors College faculty actually consists of professors from all around the campus providing the students with all different types of teaching styles and world perspectives. One of her humanities professors was actually from the French department, and she really enjoyed hearing the different cultural perspective the professor brought to the discussion. Rachel also really benefited from the constant availability of the professors in the Honors College. “The professors are always willing to meet whether it is during a scheduled appointment during their office hours or it is at a coffee shop off campus during their own free time,” she said. These hours outside of class are so beneficial because these are the times when students can talk to professors about not only school work but also their lives. “The Honors College professors really do build a personal relationship with their students, more so than any other professor that I have had on campus,” Leanne said.

However, we also realized there could be improvement in the Honors College. Rachel suggested cutting down the humanities series from three semesters to two and replacing that class with another colloquium. She believes that the humanities classes were incredibly beneficial; however, having the series occupy three semesters was a lot. She felt as if she learned some repeated information. However, she thought adding an extra colloquium would be an improvement because it gives students another chance to

choose what subject they want to study. One suggestion that Leanne offered was similar to Daniela's suggestion. She wants to see more outside work spilling out into the Muncie community. Leanne participated in a philanthropy colloquium where the students learned more about philanthropic opportunities both in Muncie and around the world, specifically in Haiti during the earthquake. They put their research into practical application when they set up a booth in the Atrium trying to raise awareness about the Haiti earthquake. Another colloquium taught by Jason Powell planned a fundraiser to raise awareness about third world country living conditions complete with a concert and food. Leanne believes that these events not only are beneficial to other students by raising awareness, but it is also beneficial to the students in the class to see their education being put into practical application and seeing that it can make a difference in the world.

# Appendix A

## Proof of IRB Application

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Mulcahy, John** <[jmulcahy@bsu.edu](mailto:jmulcahy@bsu.edu)>

Date: Tue, Jan 31, 2012 at 8:51 AM

Subject: RE: [300061-1] Diversity Redefined: A Documentary Examining Diversity in the Ball State Honors College

To: "Marten, Rachel L" <[rimarten@bsu.edu](mailto:rimarten@bsu.edu)>

Cc: "O'Hara, Laura" <[lohara@bsu.edu](mailto:lohara@bsu.edu)>

Hi Rachel,

Since your project is a documentary and the questionnaire is for screening only, it is not considered human subjects research and so your project will not need IRB approval.

I will withdraw your submission for IRB approval.

Thank you.

John

John M. Mulcahy, Jr

Associate Director

Office of Research Integrity

Ball State University

Phone- 765-285-5106

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# APPENDIX B

OMITTED AND  
RESTRICTED BY ARCHIVES  
AND SPECIAL  
COLLECTIONS STAFF

CONTAINS CONFIDENTIAL  
INFORMED CONSENT  
FORMS

(CONTACT ARCHIVES FOR MORE INFORMATION)